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Lift Your Halo, North Carolina

Good Lawd, it really did seem possible, way back
in music class, when M. said that god, instead of in heaven,

might be in everything we saw & touched:
the schoolyard's cum-scented pear trees, the hills

in undulation. The soundboard in its hum.
Even those zinging wires guiding our crookedness

between brackets & braces—you know, some bombs are named
after angels—and even the metal & Formica

of our hollow desks, all those lonely hearts drawn inside.

As for us, we were turning brassy & gay already, too late

for Jesus power chords or Teen Bibles to save us
from spelunking into the depths of our questions,

such as: what happens when the old lemon dies
and you have to call and admit it, yes, you have

driven so far away from where you could reasonably be
expected at this hour, & yes, this means that not only

have you gone & broken the hearts of those
who raised you right—the salt of the earth—

but that you also managed, in the middle of it,
to leave your lights on? O those aureolas trying hard

in the fecund heat, the gnats circling in ardor.
I had pictured myself running away with this girl

and had gotten as far as Haw River,
the town that Adam, my great-great-great something

& his wife founded in 1745, where they say
sun & stones radiated rings between the rapids. Imagine

how frequently they baptized each other
with all their clothes on, and, even still, locked

their jaws at night, turned down the lamp early
to stretch out the oil, slept side by side

like twin washboards packed away in a drawer.

The younger ones, it seems, always take on a new & stranger

sort of music: when he grew up, Jr. eventually became
a man of god, but spent his youth posing

with his hip popped, leaning cavalierly
against the plow, his lips as full as a girl's,

while the roosters preened around him, tails teased
& fabulously red. In photos, the sun looks

like an accessory, a burning medallion behind him.

When was is it that he grew stern, brimstone

& starched collar in place of
his luminosity, his lips flattened

into an absolute margin?

I was never good with authority, though I quaked

at almost everything, sore afraid in the presence
of parents & preachers & those righteous kids saying

I'm praying for you, even those hooligan adolescent
deer by the side of 40, stumbling into illumination,

leaping forward at the worst possible moment.
Not to mention (just before the car died) the girl

who reached for me just as my own trembling
hand finally found her body, my fingers cupped

like some holy person posed in a painting—
gold leaf and yards of dark blue veil, the night

a dome around us. There was light coming from somewhere
not far behind, such that our bodies stayed

shadowed but our heads backlit, inundated by what
could be described as radiance: like a window

but without the frame, the quadrants
dissolved, the lintels lifted.

We promised each other, then, absolutely
nothing but to let the auric spokes

keep turning & tuning us into our most
sexed-up selves, gloria gloria until

we traverse the whole terrain, our bodies
the sweetest pitches on this earth.